

16 March 2015

Mr Don Randall
Chair
House Standing Committee on Procedure
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Randall

Re: Inquiry into Federation Chamber on 20th anniversary of operation

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry into the role and operations of the Federation Chamber.

Below are some observations, comments and suggestions regarding the Federation Chamber.

1. Over the seven years that I have been organising speakers for the Federation Chamber, both in Opposition and now in Government, I have seen the importance and recognition of the Federation Chamber increase.
2. Its operation based on cooperation and the debating of non – controversial legislation has resulted in more collegial attitudes and behaviour within the room.
3. Federation Chamber provides Members with the only opportunity to deliver 3 minute constituency statements and grievance debates. These speaking opportunities are very keenly contested and continually have waiting lists. Vacancies are easily and readily filled and Members actively seek speaking spots.
4. This Chamber has provided a training ground for new Members to practise and perfect their speaking techniques as well as an intimate and safe environment within which to do so.
5. As most of what happens in the Federation Chamber is well structured in terms of time it means Members can plan ahead and diarise speeches. On the rare occasion when Members might have commitments in both Chambers simultaneously these have been managed quite easily. From a management point of view it is more efficient to have most of the operations of the Federation Chamber based on times so Members can plan ahead and around their speech commitments. Busy people prefer this!
6. Backbenchers have been provided with a lot more opportunities to speak since the introduction of the Federation Chamber, particularly about things that are electorate specific through 90 second statements, 3 minute statements, adjournment debates and grievance debates.
7. The Federation Chamber is also an effective outlet valve for overflow legislation, condolences, committee reports, statements etc from the House, where the hours are already long enough.
8. The backlog of committee reports should be rostered for Federation Chamber, not in Private Member Business time but separately. My suggestion would be that the grievance debate currently rostered for 8.00pm – 9.00pm Monday evening should be placed immediately

after the 90 second statements so that the room does not have to suspend from 4.45pm till 8.00pm when there is no Government business to debate in between. It would be more efficient to have Government Business after the two structured sessions – 90 secs and grievance debate. Government Business and/or Committee reports could then be started at 5.45pm and if there isn't any, the Federation Chamber could then suspend for the day.

9. As 3 minute statements seem the most popular and sought after I would suggest that possibly on Wednesday or Thursday these could be extended to one hour, instead of 30 minutes.

In summary, the Federation Chamber has a different role than the House as it is the place where backbenchers (mainly) have opportunities to speak about their electorates and their constituents, the people they represent. Without Federation Chamber they would not have the variety of speeches or the number of opportunities to do this.

Federation Chamber is also where excess and non - controversial legislation, statements, condolences etc can be debated while the House concentrates on more pressing legislation.

As a backup chamber it fulfils its role very well and speaking spots in there are highly sought after.

Yours sincerely

Vicki Riggio
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Federal Member for Forrest